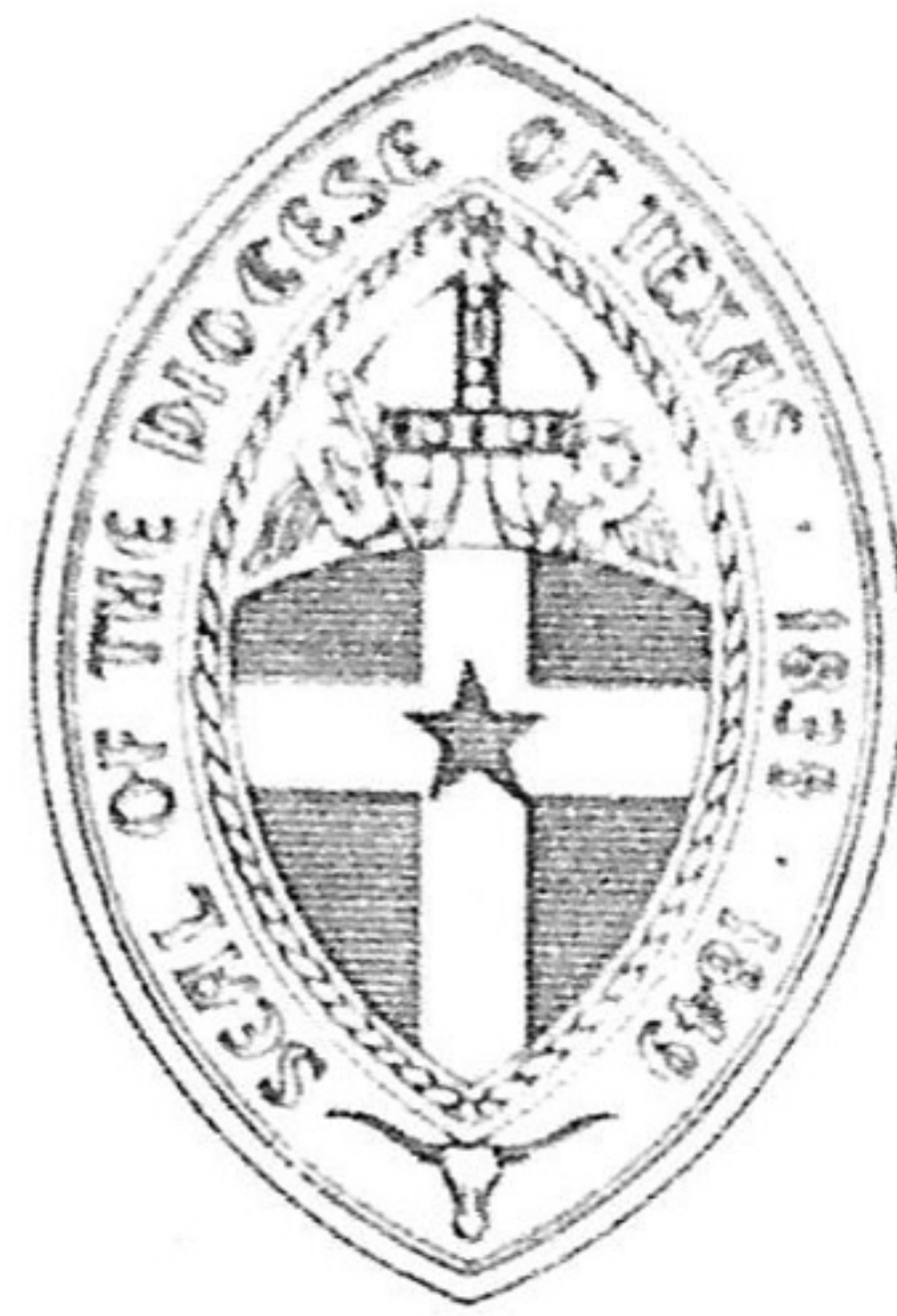




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Episcopal Diocese of Texas

Office of the Bishop

A LETTER TO ALL BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

November 3, 1993

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am writing to you on behalf of a group of women who have asked me to write to you, but perhaps I am really writing to you on behalf of all women in the Episcopal Church or perhaps on behalf of all women in our society. They feel that they have been trying, unsuccessfully, to get on the agenda of the House of Bishops, and thereby the Episcopal Church, in the cause of the terrible and tragic problem of violence against women and children in our society.

There is some feeling, and I share this, that we in the Episcopal Church, and specifically in the House of Bishops, have become preoccupied with, if not obsessed with, the subject of human sexuality, and homosexuality in particular. Thus we do not have time to consider the problem of the rampant violence inflicted on women and children by domestic violence, sex crimes or sexual abuse. I, for one, feel that we pretty much have some irreconcilable differences among us in the area of homosexuality and that we could study, dialogue or debate the subject from now till Doomsday, and we would not have a consensus among us in the House of Bishops. On the other hand, we might give some time on our agenda to a program presented by the Committee on the Status of Women of the Episcopal Church regarding the matter of the rampant violence inflicted on women and children in our world today, and perhaps we could heighten everyone's awareness of the problem, beginning with us, as well as offer constructive ways of addressing and reducing the incidence of violence against women and children, doing so with a strong consensus as a Church.

After all, women represent fifty-two per cent of our society, and perhaps an even larger percentage in the Church, and this does not mention the percentage that children represent in our society. You are talking about a substantial proportion of our population which is victimized by this violence or by having to live in fear of it.

By way of illustration of the problem, the Viet Nam War, in which approximately 58,000 American servicemen died, brought radical changes to our American society, in our attitude toward political authority, toward military service and toward our U.S. foreign policy. Truly, our nation will never be the same. However, it is estimated that during that same period of time approximately 55,000 women died in this country as a result of domestic violence and sex crimes, and this seems to have received little attention from any of us. Those women have not had a wall erected in their memory!

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Furthermore, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, utilizing 1989 statistics in the United States: there are at least 4,000,000 reported incidents of domestic violence against women each year; a battering incident occurs every fifteen seconds; battering of women in the home is the most under-reported crime; men commit ninety-eight per cent of known battering assaults; more than 4,000 women are killed each year at the hands of their batterers; adult-to-adult violence is experienced by more than 15,000,000 women, children and men each year; more than one household in six has been the scene of a spouse striking his or her partner in the past year; male children who witness adult-to-adult domestic violence are, as adults, seven hundred times more likely to beat their female partners; male children who also are physically abused are, as adults, one thousand times more likely to beat their female partners.

In the state of Texas, according to the Department of Human Services, more than 100,000 women are assaulted in their own homes at least once a week. These are reported incidents, and it is estimated that the actual number of incidents is far higher.

According to an article in the Washington Post on violence against women, every fifteen seconds a woman is beaten by her husband or boyfriend. Every six minutes a woman is raped. One in three American girls will be sexually molested by age eighteen. One in every four female college students will be sexually attacked before she graduates.

All of these terrible and tragic statistics are well known to you, but I think our question is what can we in the Church do to address this problem. Although I am sure persons wiser than I would have more ideas, I would suggest that we Bishops begin by trying to place the subject on the agenda within our own dioceses, perhaps beginning with our E.C.W., but then moving on to address all of us men in the Church, as it is we men who perpetrate ninety-eight per cent of the violence of which we are speaking. Furthermore, I would suggest that we request that our Kanuga planning committee set aside at least some period of time to hear a presentation from the Committee on the Status of Women or the National Board of the E.C.W., to enlighten us Bishops on this topic on the basis of their study.

Finally, I would hope that we could call on the agenda committee for the forthcoming General Convention at Indianapolis to invite the Committee on the Status of Women to make a presentation to a joint session, which might result in not only heightened awareness of the problem, but perhaps also educational programs available throughout the Church that would lead to reduced incidence of such violence. Again, I would think that we could address this problem in a constructive and unified way as the Episcopal Church.

With my warmest regards to each one of you,

Yours in Christ,



Maurice M. Benitez, D.D.
Bishop of Texas